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ABSTRACT

The author reviews the background of mainstreaming and least restrictive environment placement for handicapped children, cites problems with the implementation of the concept, and suggests a cooperative approach. He asserts that the learning environment should be modified by focusing on the following factors: modification of content and materials, communication, instructional techniques and strategies, characteristics of the handicapped, classroom management, and consultation skills. Further, he suggests that these teacher support concepts must be developed through cooperative efforts of both general education and special education staff. (CL)

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Position

on

Least Restrictive Environment

"Mainstreaming"

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Special Education Division
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April 3, 1980

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Introduction

The education of handicapped students has followed a pattern from neglect, denial and rejection, to placement in state institutions, to placement in self contained rooms, to the current practice of promoting mainstreaming. Education of the handicapped began in the 19th century when a few educational pioneers began to teach mentally deficient, blind and deaf students. During the late 19th century, this led to the development of state institutions called schools, with early emphasis on education of the deaf, blind and later the mentally retarded.

Public schools, including those in Detroit, began opening self-contained rooms in the early 1900's for the mentally impaired. However, students with sensory deficiencies, the deaf and blind, and most mentally impaired continued to be placed in state schools.

Moderate growth in special classrooms continued until after World War II. In 1948, 442,000 students were enrolled in special education programs in the United States. By 1963 this number had grown to 1,666,000 students, most of them classified as mentally impaired, deaf, blind or physically impaired. This growth continued until there were 3,777,106 students in programs for the handicapped in 1978.

Oakland County was a part of this growth trend. In 1954, when only a few programs for the handicapped were available, a landmark Special Education millege was passed which provided funds for education of the handicapped. At this time two important trends emerged: 1) general education teachers were encouraged to refer low achieving and problem students to special education, and 2) a dual school

system began to develop. Special Education soon had its own administration, its own funding sources, its own teaching staff and its own support staff. General education administrators supported this dual system, by encouraging their teachers to exclude handicapped students from their classes by referring them to special education. School principals did not consider special education teachers as part of their staff and thereby reinforced this dual system. Special education programs increased; there were fewer than 100 special education staff in the county in 1955, more than 500 in 1967, and 1,700 in 1980.

Special education faced the problem of what to teach. Curriculum guides were developed to assist teachers in defining their instructional program. The emphasis was on affective behavior and helping to correct the handicapping disability. (Caster 1975) This emphasis overlooked the concept of the "whole child". The longer students were kept in special education programs the more difficult it became for them to return to general education.

Theories of education of the handicapped suggested that some disabilities, especially learning disabilities, could be corrected with proper remediation procedures. The theories further implied that this corrective procedure would be successful in the elementary schools. It failed in most cases and as a result the special programs were continued into the secondary schools where they haven't been very successful either.

The lack of instructional progress disturbed parent groups, which had been active in supporting and promoting better education for their students in the state institutional schools and now turned

their attention toward public schools. When education for the handicapped moved into local schools the parents pushed for better local programs for their handicapped students. Once programs were available locally, parents began to look at instructional content.

In the late 1960's the special education movement toward integration closely paralleled the civil rights movement. The initial concern was that mildly retarded children of ethnic minority groups were placed in disproportionately high numbers in special classes.

Parent groups and handicapped individuals concerned about "rights of the handicapped" looked to the judicial system. When the courts became involved other issues were presented. The major issues were: 1) the practice of testing using inadequate, culturally biased instruments, 2) placement procedures which did not include parental involvement, 3) the inability of special classes to develop adequate educational and vocational skills, and 4) the often damaging effects of special education placement and the related labeling process. (Cohen and DeYoung 1973) One of the key components of both the Michigan Special Education code and P.L. 94-142 required teacher and support staff to develop for each student an individual educational plan to be written in educational objective format. This was the <u>first</u> strong movement to stress <u>instructional</u> content for the handicapped.

Scope of Problem

Oakland County had over 20,000 special education students as of January 15, 1980. An analysis by categories shows that about 80% of these students have normal intelligence.

Emotionally Impaired	2,944
Learning Disabled	7,751
Speech and Language Impaired	5,129
	15,824

Most of these are potential students for mainstreaming. Severely and trainable mentally impaired and severely handicapped students in all disability areas may find that the least restrictive environment is the self-contained classroom.

Hard of hearing, physically and otherwise health impaired and blind add more than 1,000 students. These students have some type of learning and/or behavior problems frequently these can be at least partially overcome through teaching techniques.

The present need of handicapped students is an instructional program to provide and facilitate appropriate instruction in the least restrictive environment.

Definition of Least Restrictive Environment (121a.550) as it appears in P.L. 94-142

Least Restrictive Environment

-"To the maximum extent appropriate, handicapped children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not handicapped, and

-that special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of handicapped children from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity

of the handicap is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily."

Mainstreaming special education students into general education classrooms is a confused issue. Nevertheless, the concept of mainstreaming/least restrictive environment exists in the law and in limited practice. There is no agreement on a single definition and both general and special education teachers are afraid of the idea, for different reasons.

It is almost impossible to react to mainstreaming as a global concept. What does it mean? Will the gains in education for handicapped persons be wiped out? Will general education classes be disrupted and crowded by 'difficult' students?

Mainstreaming is not a conundrum without hope for satisfactory solution. There is a key--instructional integration. Instructional integration divided into the identified concepts of communication, modification of materials, characteristics of handicapped students, student achievement, and consulting skills makes mainstreaming understandable and manageable.

Mainstreaming is an educational problem that must become a shared responsibility if emotional heat is to be dissipated and it is to succeed. The focus of instruction is curriculum content. The general education teacher can not deny this focus for students with special needs and special education teachers can not protect them from it. What is to be learned is the same; how it is learned

may be different. There is need for knowledge and empathy, not sympathy. The learning environment must be a satisfactory one for all students and must be so structured.

Both Special Education staff and General Education staff are displaying resistance to change. Special Education leaders are stating (Reynolds and Birch 1977) that "The regular classroom teacher will need to become more knowledgeable about exceptional children and more competent in their instruction of children with a variety of disabilities."

The usual suggestion is that special education staff should provide in-service to general education staff. Following the in-service an interface between general and special education teachers to accomplish shared responsibility for the total program of the exceptional child is considered crucial for successful programming in the "least restrictive environment".

Instructional roles become critical, both from a practical and an emotional standpoint. The practical issue is that general education will have more students to teach, while special education will have fewer. (And special education already has a reduced classload.) One immediate reaction to this characteristic of mainstreaming was the Denver plan of a weighted factor for handicapped students. That is, each handicapped student is to be counted more than one student when placed in a regular classroom.

The practical problem is compounded by the emotional issue that suggests that special education teachers carry out diagnostic functions with each child and then offer educational prescriptions

and suggestions to a content teacher. In practice the special education teacher is often a recent graduate with minimal experience. This disparity in background can create a potential probelm for both special and general education staff.

The initial concern of special education has been measurement of similarities and differences among educational personnel in their attitudes toward mainstreaming. (Overline 1977.) Efforts were then directed toward the improvement of attitudes regarding mainstreaming among both general and special educators.

The research pointed out that teachers were concerned about how and what to do to appropriately mainstream students. This led to the development and implementation of "How to do it" models. The "How to do it" models, (Kaufman, 1978) suggest procedures on how to determine current level of performance, how to prepare an instructional program, how to modify general education textbooks and manage a resource room type of classroom which provides academic support to mainstreamed students. The models suggested that general education teachers would need to modify course standards and keep the student in the room, usually segregated with separate assignments.

Neither party was happy with this arrangement. Basically there is a poor or non-existent feedback loop for general education and a critical component is missing - no reward system. More time and effort were required and frustration toward mainstreaming resulted. This led to research reports that said the attitude of teachers was more negative after one year of mainstreaming students in their class. (Overline 1975)

Operational Definitions

Mainstreaming (according to the Council for Exceptional Children) is: providing the most appropriate education for each child in the least restrictive setting; looking at the educational needs of children instead of clinical or diagnostic labels for either the physically or mentally handicapped or the gifted; looking for and creating alternatives that will help general educators serve children with learning or adjustment problems in the regular classroom setting, using a variety of support services; uniting the skills of general education and special education so that all children may have an equal educational opportunity. (Official Action 1977, p. 43)

"Mainstreaming (according to Kaufman et al 1978) refers to temporal, instructional and social integration of eligible exceptional students with normal peers based on an ongoing, individually determined educational planning and programming process, and requires clarification of responsibility among regular and special education administrative, instructional and supportive personnel."

Temporal integration refers to time a student spends in general education classrooms with non-handicapped peers. Instructional integration refers to the extent the handicapped student shares in the instructional environment of the classroom. Social integration refers to the handicapped student's proximity, interactive behavior, assimilation and acceptance by his classmates.

Many handicapped students, particularly those that were in special education for a number of years, were taught in a special environment that attempted to stress correction of the handicapping

conditions. Frequently basic instruction in subject-matter areas was delayed. The emphasis was one of teaching the handicapped "at their pace", a term that was not defined. This usually resulted in less learning than would be expected by general education teachers. A number of reasons could be offered: 1) special education teachers are not provided the content skills needed to create a developmental program in areas such as reading or math; 2) special education teachers are given skills in providing strength in mental health; and 3) special education teachers are provided skills in correcting the handicapping condition. The result is that the longer the child is in special education the further behind general education students he becomes. (Fine 1977) (Dick 1976)

Research seems to show, that in spite of a reduced teacher class load, additional support services and special training, handicapped students do not learn more in the special classroom. (Goldstein 1964)

The key may be one of Content Instruction. Defining "what a student should learn" is a difficult and continuing problem. Given that the handicapped student frequently functions below grade level and has some type of learning problem, the task becomes one of developing and/or providing instructional modifications and techniques to assist the handicapped student to learn the instructional content provided by general education.

When both general and special education teachers were asked their concerns about mainstreaming, their responses were anxiety, stress and frustration. Only after deeper probing did they reveal more concrete concerns including time, communication and lack of student achievement.

Teachers had trouble finding the ways to make mainstreaming successful.

The display, Figure 1 (which follows) is an example of how a student could be mainstreamed. If followed as described, it increases fears, anxiety and rejection by classmates and the adults involved because:

A. "Too many general education teachers have been instructed, very well taught, have been convinced that one of their professional duties is to identify, and assist in the placement of exceptional children in special classes. We have been trained to exclude, not to accept and include." (Stannard 1976)

B. Special education has been instructed to accept those that general education wishes to exclude. The Educational Placement and Planning Committee certifies that a student is handicapped, labels the child as handicapped, states where the child will be placed, with how much time in special and general education.

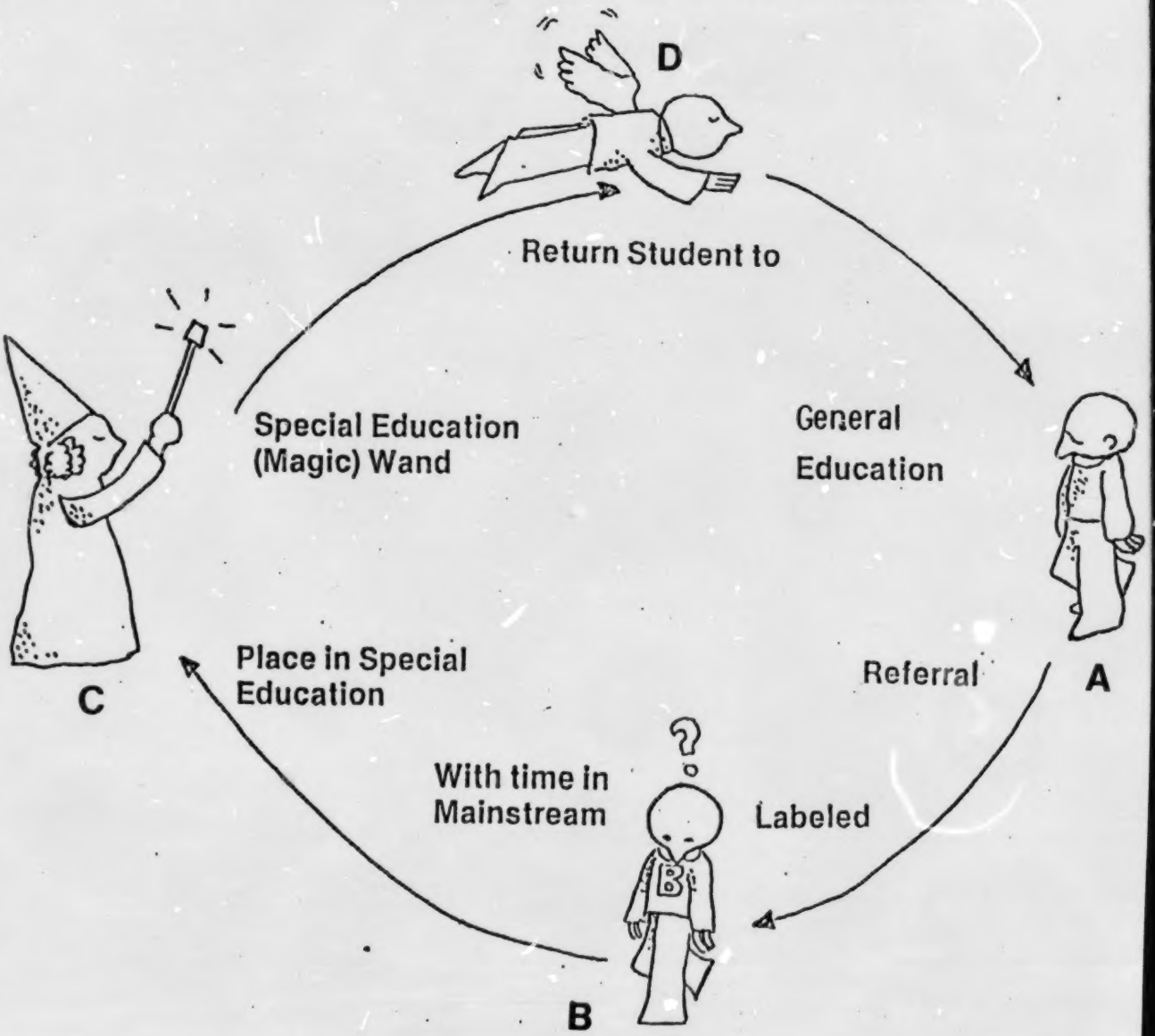
C. and D. The "how to" models are implemented here. The special education teacher looks for a general education teacher who will accept this student and then places the student in that class.

"Mainstreaming is cited so frequently that one might mistakenly think it a magic elixir rather than a particular orientation toward supplying special education services for the majority of the mildly handicapped." (Glickling and Theobald 1974)

When the instructional support system is lacking, handicapped students find themselves back in the environment where they experienced failure previously. These students do require a change in the instructional environment, such as modification of content, techniques and strategies to teach mainstreamed students and a communication procedure to support teachers.

FRUSTRATION MODEL

Figure #1 An Example of How a Student Could be Mainstreamed



Analysis of Problem

Our work with both General Education and Special Education teachers has led to the following lists of problem areas. These teachers stated that knowledge about the areas and skills in implementation of some of the areas were necessary in dealing with mainstreamed students. Over 200 teachers were in the sample with discussion held in small (8-10) groups.

Areas:

Characteristics of Handicapped
Modification of Materials and Content
Communication
Student Achievement
Instructional Techniques and Strategies
Consulting Skills
Classroom Management

These areas have a direct effect upon:

Time
Energy

Lack of information in any area listed above directly affects the learning environment, leading to a child centered program, where students are examined over and over to find out why they do not learn. This paper suggests that the students should be given an educational assessment to determine their unique levels of performance and perhaps to learn some characteristics of their learning procedures. Then an instructional plan that is content and goal directed should be developed for the student. Special educators, Jones (1978) and MacMillan and Semmel (1977), support this idea, suggesting that what is being taught to the handicapped student may be more important than where this is taught. These authors further state that teaching procedures that failed once with any student will probably fail again if re-tried. Other procedures must be used if instruction is to

succeed. In other words, to deal with learning deficits, we must deal with possible teaching deficits in the problem concept areas. See Figure 2, Page 15.

Change in Focus

Instructional content from General Education should become the focus. With content as a focus, efforts and emotions are directed away from the student toward the content and learning environment - the emphasis is changed from "Why doesn't John learn?" to "How can we modify the environment so John can learn?" This frees the teachers to redirect their efforts toward improvement of the learning environment.

Attention to the following areas can and should become part of modifying the learning environment, when such modification is required. These areas should yield the most appropriate results.

Modification of content and materials - A task analysis prccedure to modify General Education content and materials would provide alternative procedures to guide the student toward achievement of the content - a parallel curriculum which would allow the handicapped student to follow a curriculum leading to the achievement of instructional goals similar to those achieved by General Education students.

Communication - One of the keys to successful mainstreaming is providing a communication network between special and general education. With an instructional structure professional staff members would be able to discuss content in relation to the student.

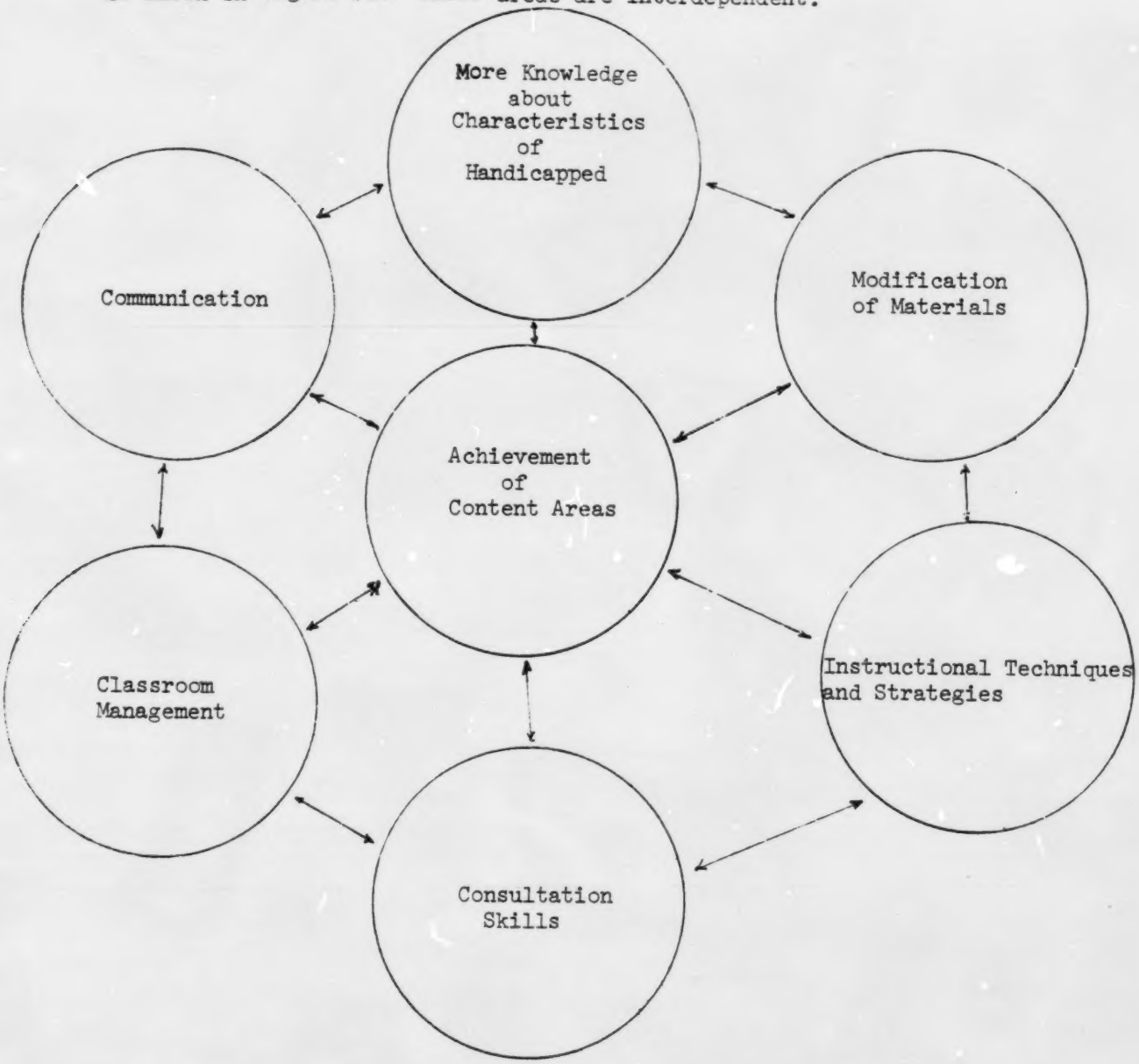
Instructional Techniques and Strategies - A resource of methods and suggestions for teaching difficult content, dealing with specific behavioral problems and specific learning problems. Cross referencing the suggestions to content whenever possible encourages teachers to use the materials.

Characteristics of the Handicapped - Knowledge and awareness of characteristics of the handicapped can assist teachers in developing or selecting alternative procedures to instruct their students; so can knowing how to use tape recordings and braille books for the blind, captioned films for Hearing Impaired, or instructional aids of various types designed to assist students to learn. Best of all, having this knowledge can free the emotional fears and allow the teacher to teach.

Classroom Management - Many students are considered to be handicapped because of their behavior. Management suggestions related to correcting specific behavioral problems are a necessary part of the instructional program, but a management guide is only the beginning and a continuing program is important for most of the mainstreamed students.

Consultation Skills - Special Education is a support system to General Education. Part of that support system is to provide assistance for both the General Education teacher and the mainstreamed student. Consultation, to be successful, must have a direct relationship to the various concepts and to achievement of instructional content.

Relationship of the areas considered to be problem areas as defined by both General Education and Special Education teachers is shown in Figure #2. These areas are interdependent.



Achievement is the focus for this model. Knowledge areas and skills that can assist in the achievement of content are listed in the various circles clustered around the content. To increase achievement, one or several of the support areas must be strengthened. To assist teachers in their instruction in-service can be provided by content areas and/or concepts WITH A COMBINATION OF BOTH GENERAL EDUCATION AND SPECIAL EDUCATION.

Figure 2

Developing a Positive Learning Environment

Mainstreaming implies that general education can provide a more appropriate learning experience. However, special educators are for the most part doing the planning and the implementation. This procedure then becomes an imposition upon general education by special education. Both parties, general education and special education, must do a joint needs assessment, joint planning, and joint participation.

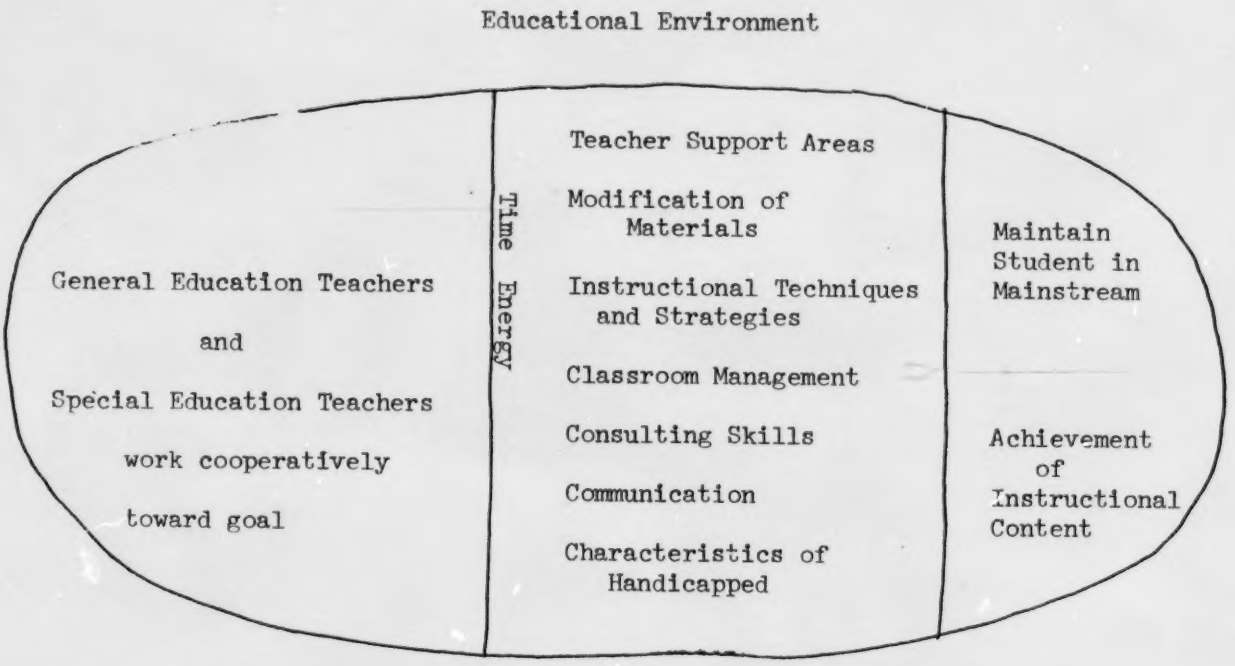
To reach the goal, "to maintain the handicapped student in the mainstream", Figure #3 (which follows) looks at some of the steps and problems in reaching the goal.

Changing the educational environment for mainstreaming is an important start. First, the teachers from general education and special education will need to remain in the environment. Cooperative efforts by the instructional staff are needed to overcome the barrier of time and energy in their efforts to reach the goal of mainstreaming.

One of the critical areas is that of a poor, or non-existent, feedback loop. The second area is that of a negative reward system. The better the teacher does, the more handicapped students she/he receives, the more problems the teacher encounters and the more time and effort required to correct these problems .

The reward system is one of more work and frustration if you work with handicapped students in the mainstream-a negative reward. If the demands are excessive then teachers may leave the environment.

Figure #3



Without the teacher support concepts teachers must expend time and energy developing these support concepts to be able to teach mainstreamed students. Reward is more students requiring more time and energy.

With teacher support concepts available teachers will have necessary tools available to teach and students will be successful and achieve. Reward - Time and energy expended will be minimal and student achievement will increase.

Teachers must proceed through the time and energy barrier utilizing the support concepts to instruct the mainstreamed student. These support concepts also serve to provide the teacher support to remain in the environment.

We suggest that the barrier must be reduced, that is, mainstreaming of handicapped students should not require excessive energy and extra time. The teaching support concepts must be provided and must be developed by cooperative efforts of both General Education and Special Education staff.

The teacher support concepts must be positive, a plus for teachers, a positive reward. Teachers will accept and work with handicapped students if the support concepts as listed are available.

The goal is attainable when consideration is given to teachers and when we work cooperatively.

When the environment provides the necessary support, special education and general education can successfully mainstream handicapped students. General education teachers will be able to focus on instructional content and special education teachers can support general education programs.

Developing a Positive **Instructional** Environment

Cooperatively

Special Education brings:	Goal- Students will achieve Instructional Content as presented in general education classes.	General Education brings:
Knowledge of Characteristics of Handicapped Students	Develop parallel alternative content (modify content)	Knowledge of Instructional Content
Knowledge of procedures to teach handicapped students	Develop instructional techniques and strategies to teach the mainstreamed students.	Knowledge of procedures to teach instructional content to students
	Develop a classroom management guide.	

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